

Media Release

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GOOD NEWS AS NATIONAL SMOKING RATES DECLINE

New AIHW report shows smoking rates down overall and continuing to decline in young adults

Cancer Council has welcomed new data showing smoking rates in Australia have fallen to a historic low of 11 per cent and calls for more of what works in tobacco control to further reduce rates to single figures.

Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *National Drug Strategy Household Survey* showed the number of daily smokers aged over 14 has fallen significantly since 2016, with 11 per cent of Australians now smoking (down from 12.2 per cent in 2016).

63 per cent of Australians now report they have never smoked with that figure increasing to almost 97 per cent among those under the age of 18.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO, Cancer Council Australia said most of the decline had been driven by reductions in smoking in young people, continuing a long-term trend since governments stepped up tobacco control efforts in the 1990s.

"We are now seeing the percentage of younger Australians who have never smoked reach an all-time high, which augurs well for the nation's future health and reflects the benefits of de-normalising smoking over the past two decades," Professor Aranda said.

Professor Aranda said declines were slower and prevalence results mixed in older age groups, highlighting the need for more of what works to bring smoking rates down further among all populations.

"Based on the evidence of what works, the most urgent need is a revival of hard-hitting antismoking campaigns, which research shows are effective in older smokers – particularly those with families and those who have smoked for some time and may be increasingly susceptible to hard-hitting messages about the health harms.

"The data reinforces the impact of health concerns on quitting behaviour, as well as the cost of tobacco products – further showing the benefits of tobacco excise in driving down prevalence.

Professor Aranda said the good news comes at an opportune time, with a draft new National Tobacco Strategy in development, a review of evidence-based tobacco control legislation and health minister Greg Hunt's landmark national preventive health strategy.

"With two in three Australian smokers risking premature death from their habit, this is no time for complacency in tobacco control. We need more of what has worked to halve smoking rates over the past 25 years and get prevalence into single digits as a priority."

Professor Aranda said the new report also showed an increase in e-cigarette use in young people, including among those who continue to smoke and those who had never smoked. Importantly, 64.5 per cent of 14-17 year olds and 39 per cent of 18-24 year olds reported that they were never smokers at the point they first tried e-cigarettes.



“The new data suggests most of these young e-cigarette users either never smoked or continue to smoke, exposing the huge commercial incentive for tobacco and retail industries to target them and highlighting that e-cigarettes do not reduce smoking rates in young people, and may increase them.

“Combined with established evidence that e-cigarettes are no more effective as a quitting aid than safer options, as well evidence of their dual use and association with smoking and nicotine addiction in young people, Australia’s precautionary approach needs to continue.

“We’re on the threshold of a new generation of smoke- and nicotine-free young Australians, free from the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry.

“Today’s new report shows we need more of what works to protect young Australians from commercial interests. And we need more of what works to bring down smoking prevalence across all populations.”

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